

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 TEL AV 03002 070805Z
ACTION NODS-00

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S E C R E T TEL AVIV 3002

EXDIS DIST AS NODIS

JERUSALEM FOR ATHERTON- EYES ONLY

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, ISN, US, XF

SUBJECT: ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS

REF: STATE 54253

1. I MET WITH BEGIN EVENING OF MARCH 6 FOR ALMOST AN HOUR AT HIS KNESSET OFFICE, WITH ONLY HIS ASSISTANT YEHUDA AVNER PRESENT. MOST OF DISCUSSION WAS ABOUT HIS VISIT TO WASHINGTON NEXT WEEK (SEPTTEL). WHEN HE LISTED "THE PROBLEM OF THE SETTLEMENTS" AS ONE TOPIC HE ASSUMED WOULD COME UP, I TOOK OPPURTUNITY TO MAKE THE APPROACH ON SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY AS INSTRUCTED IN REFTEL.

2. WENT OVER THE GROUND THOROUGHLY, MAKING ALL THE POINTS IN PARAS TWO AND THREE OF REFTEL ALMOST VERBATIM, AND UNDERSCORING POINT THAT THESE WERE PRESIDENT CARTER'S
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VIEWS WHICH I HAD BEEN ASKED TO CONVEY. I SAID SEVERAL TIMES THAT A COMPLETE HALT OR FREEZE ON ALL NEW SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY IS ESSENTIAL TO PROVIDE THE BASIS FOR SERIOUS NEGOTIATIONS--WITHOUT PREJUDICE TO NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE PARTIES OVER THE LONG-TERM FUTURE OF EXISTING SETTLEMENTS. MADE CLEAR THAT OUR POSITION ON THE NEED FOR A HALT IN SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY IS NOT A SUBJECT FOR

NEGOTIATION. IN GOING OVER THE POINTS IN PARA THREE OF REFTEL, I LAID SPECIAL STRESS ON THE FACT THAT PRIVATE ASSURANCES TO SADAT ARE NOT OF MUCH HELP WHEN CONTRADICTORY PUBLIC STATEMENTS ARE BEING MADE SIMULTANEOUSLY BY OTHER MINISTERS.

3. BEGIN LISTENED DISPIRITEDLY, THEN MADE SOME HALF-HEARTED REJOINDERS. HE INSISTED THE GOI HAD "LIVED UP SCRUPULOUSLY" TO THE "AGREEMENT BETWEEN DAYAN AND CARTER" RESTRICTING WEST BANK SETTLEMENT ONLY TO MILITARY CAMPS. (HE QUICKLY ACKNOWLEDGED, HOWEVER, THAT PRESIDENT CARTER HAD ACCEPTED THIS "ONLY AS SECOND BEST.") HE SAID HE WOULD WISH TO LEARN IN WASHINGTON WHETHER WE "WISHED TO CONTINUE THIS ARRANGEMENT OR NOT."

4. BEGIN THEN BEGAN TO MUSE ABOUT WHAT A "FREEZE" MIGHT MEAN; IT WOULD BE SEEN AS "AN ADMISSION OF GUILT ABOUT OUR PREVIOUS SETTLEMENTS--AND THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NOTHING WRONG ABOUT THEM" (I TRIED TO PERSUADE HIM TO THINK OF A SETTLEMENT FREEZE INSTEAD AS A MEANS OF DEMONSTRATING HIS READINESS TO GO THE EXTRA MILE FOR PEACE; HOWEVER, HE WASN'T HAVING ANY.) AS FOR PUBLIC STATEMENTS VS. PRIVATE ASSURANCES, HE DID NOT DISPUTE MY POINT--BUT CONCENTRATED ON EXPLAINING WHY HE HAD NOT BEEN OVERLY EAGER TO EXTEND THE EXPLANATION TO SADAT, EVEN IN PRIVATE. THE POINT IS "DIGNITY" AND PRIDE. HE
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SAYS SADAT HAS KNOWN FROM THE BEGINNING THAT THE SINAI SETTLEMENTS "CANNOT BE REMOVED". BEGIN IS WARY OF SAYING ANYTHING WHICH SEEMS TO BE "YIELDING TO PRESSURE," SINCE THAT ONLY "STIMULATES MORE PRESSURE." HE CLAIMS THAT ANY PUBLIC STATEMENT WOULD BE INTERPRETED AS RETREAT, AND THAT THE PAST SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY HAS BEEN TOTALLY LEGITIMATE.

5. FROM THIS POINT ON HE WAS OBVIOUSLY UNINTERESTED IN PROLONGING OUR DEBATE ABOUT SETTLEMENTS, SEEMED RESIGNED TO FACING IT IN WASHINGTON, AND IN GENERAL APPEARED WEARY AND DEPRESSED. THERE WAS NO SUGGESTION THAT HE EXPECTED TO BE ABLE TO STRIKE A "DEAL" WITH US; RATHER THAT HE IS RESIGNED TO HAVING TO SUFFER OUR LACK OF COMPREHENSION OF HIS PROBLEM.

6. A FAINT SPARK APPEARED ONCE-- WHEN HE REMINDED ME THAT PRIME MINISTER RABIN HAD ONCE HAD TO REJECT A DIPLOMATIC NOTE ON THE SUBJECT OF SETTLEMENTS AS EXCESSIVE INTERFERENCE IN ISRAEL'S AFFAIRS. BUT IT WAS A FLEETING MOMENT OF COMBATIVENESS. THE REST OF THE DISCUSSION SHOWED MORE RESIGNATION THAN DESIRE TO ARGUE,

THOUGH NO PROPENSITY TO MODIFY HIS VIEWS.

7. IN LIGHT OF THIS MORNING'S NEWS, IT IS NOW EASIER TO UNDERSTAND BEGIN'S DESPONDENCY LAST NIGHT. A HA'ARETZ CORRESPONDENT WITH EZER WEIZMAN IN NEW YORK HAS REPORTED THAT WEIZMAN THREATENED BEGIN YESTERDAY TO RESIGN IMMEDIATELY IF HIS ORDER TO HALT WORK AT TWO WEST BANK SETTLEMENT SITES WERE VIOLATED. (HE HAD SUSPENDED WORK AT BEIT EL AND NABI SALEH JUST BEFORE LEAVING.) MEANWHILE, THE GUSH EMUNIM HAS ANNOUNCED IT IS LAUNCHING A NATIONWIDE CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT'S "BETRAYAL" OF THE SETTLERS (?) MY DEMARCHE LAST NIGHT ON BEHALF OF PRESIDENT CARTER MUST HAVE SEEMED LIKE THE FINAL STRAW.

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